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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 000313

SIPDIS

NSC FOR DNSA ABRAMS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM KIRF KISL IR SY EG OVIP
SUBJECT: CODEL WOLF DISCUSSES AYMAN NOUR, RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM, UN MATTERS, AND REGIONAL SECURITY WITH PRESIDENT
MUBARAK

Classified by Ambassador Francis Ricciardone for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) In a January 17 meeting with President Hosni
Mubarak, Congressman Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) pressed the GOE on:

--finding a solution to the Ayman Nour issue;
--supporting and expanding religious freedom;
--supporting US positions at the UN, especially with regard
to Human Rights Commission reform and the Iranian nuclear
question; and
--controlling the challenges from Iran and Syria.

President Mubarak replied that the Nour issue was in the
hands of the "independent Egyptian judiciary." He asserted
that no one has done more for Egypt's Christians than he has.
 The President said that Egyptian public opinion and Egypt's
role in the Group of 77 limited its ability to support USG
positions in international fora. The President noted that
Egypt has played a supportive role on Iraq and on other
regional challenges, including Syria. The President also
expressed his concerns about the threat of the Muslim
Brotherhood. End summary.

¶2. (C) Congressman Frank Wolf met President Mubarak, who
was joined by his spokesman Ambassador Soliman Awad, at
Ittihadiya Palace for 45 minutes on January 17, immediately
after Mubarak's meeting with Vice President Cheney. The
Ambassador, Rep. Wolf's Chief of Staff Dan Scandling, and
poloff Roger Kenna (notetaker) accompanied the Congressman.

Ayman Nour

¶3. (C) Congressman Wolf opened the meeting--as he did with
interlocutors at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior,
Justice, and Trade-Industry, as well as with presidential son
Gamal Mubarak--by passing the President copies of the
December 29, 2005 masthead editorials about Ayman Nour in the
Washington Post and New York Times. Rep. Wolf said that he
was speaking to the President as "a friend," "with great
respect," and in the belief that "good friends have to be
open with each other." Rep. Wolf said that he did not intend
to dwell on the particulars of the Nour case, but on the fact
that Nour's continued imprisonment--in the eyes of many in
Congress--is "an impediment to our relationship."

¶4. (C) Rep. Wolf told Mubarak he felt like he was watching
in slow motion as an accident took place involving a friend.
Rep. Wolf argued that Nour was "an unknown" for members of
Congress until he was arrested in January 2005, but that the
GOE's jailing of Nour had raised his profile tremendously,
"like (the British jailing of) Gandhi." He urged the
President to use his influence to work for Nour's release
from prison pending his appeal to Egypt's highest court (the
Court of Cassation). Rep. Wolf told Mubarak that he
understood that Nour might be eligible for a suspended
sentence or to be confined to his home pending his appeal.

¶5. (C) President Mubarak responded that neither house
arrest nor probation was an option, and that the entire
matter lies with the Egyptian courts. He said that he had
personally "helped this man (Nour) a lot. I sympathized with
him at the beginning." Mubarak said that he had "prevented"
an earlier criminal case against Nour when then-Minister of
Information Technology and Communications Nazif (the current
PM) had sought to prosecute Nour for a scam involving
international telephone services. Mubarak asserted that he
had "helped" Nour with his run for president. Mubarak
attributed Nour's loss of his parliamentary seat in November
2005 to the animus of the Wafd candidate No'man Goma' who had
been humiliated by his distant third-place finish in the
presidential contest. Mubarak alluded to the case of an
unnamed Mubarak family member who had been prosecuted for
unspecified crimes, and said that he had been powerless in
the face of the independent Egyptian judiciary to intervene

in the case of his family member. Mubarak asserted that
Nour's wife, Gameela Ismail, who is a journalist and "is
making lots of stories," was responsible for alleging that
Nour had been unfairly treated. "You can be sure," said the
president, "that we did not interfere one way or the other."

Religious Freedom

¶6. (C) Rep. Wolf thanked the President for his efforts to
preserve and expand religious freedom, and urged him to
continue to make progress on this important issue. Regarding
the December 2005 presidential decree devolving decisions
about Church repair and rebuilding to governorate level
decisions, the President noted that he had sought to devolve
all decisions to the governorate level, but that Coptic Pope
Shenouda III had specifically asked the President to maintain
control of the process for granting permits for new church
construction.

¶7. (C) In response to Rep. Wolf's questions about the
requirement that religious identity (limited to the "three
Heavenly religions": Judaism, Christianity, or Islam) appear
on national ID cards, the President asserted that it would be
"dangerous" to do away with the requirement since it would
lead to confusion and the potential for fraud in civil cases
which are often decided according to religious (vice civil)
laws.

UN Issues

¶8. (C) Turning to the issue of UN reform, Rep. Wolf pressed
the President for GOE support on UN management reform, the
new Human Rights Council, and the referral of Iran by the
IAEA to the Security Council. The President noted that
public opinion, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, prevented
the GOE from taking positions in international fora that were
at odds with the Group of 77 or that appeared to hold Israel
to a different standard. "The Group of 77 is not always
right," replied Rep. Wolf.

The Muslim Brotherhood

¶9. (C) In response to Rep. Wolf's question about the
significance of the Muslim Brotherhood, the President said
that the MB members of Parliament were the inheritors of a
tradition of terror that had tried to kill Nasser, had killed
Sadat, and "tried to kill me in Addis Ababa in 1995."
Mubarak assured Rep. Wolf that the GOE is watching the MB
"very closely," and that intelligence cooperation between the
USG and GOE on this subject was very strong.

Iran

¶10. (C) Turning to Iran, President Mubarak expressed his
profound distrust of Iran and its Shi'a religious government.
 He described Iran as an agent of malign influence in every
country in the region with a sizable Shi'a population.

Syria

¶11. (C) The President reviewed for Rep. Wolf his efforts to
secure the cooperation of the Bashar Al-Asad regime with the
Mehlis investigation. He also alluded to his counsel to Asad
to secure Syria's border with Iraq. Mubarak noted that he
believed that promoting the ouster of Asad was misguided
since it would spark a return to the situation in Syria in
the early 1950s, when "whoever among the military got out of
bed first in the morning was able to launch a coup that day."

Soliman Awad on the Margins

¶12. (C) In a pull-aside with Rep. Wolf after the meeting
with the President, Spokesman Soliman Awad reviewed the
details of the GOE case against Nour and provided Congressman
Wolf with a non-paper of the alleged evidence of Nour's shady
past and a copy of a May 2005 Washington Times article making
the same claim. Awad also noted that the GOE's efforts to
take steps to improve religious freedom, including the
contentious matter of religious identity on national ID
cards, was constrained by the need to proceed carefully so as
not to inflame extremist Islamist opinion against the GOE.
Awad argued that the GOE could not provide civil documents to
Baha'is, or Muslims who have converted to Christianity,
without sparking a backlash from the Islamists. Rep. Wolf

told Awad that the USG had not identified a precise solution
to the problem but rather hoped that the GOE could devise an
Egyptian solution to this obvious problem.

¶14. (U) Rep. Wolf did not have the opportunity to clear
this message before his departure.

RICCIARDONE